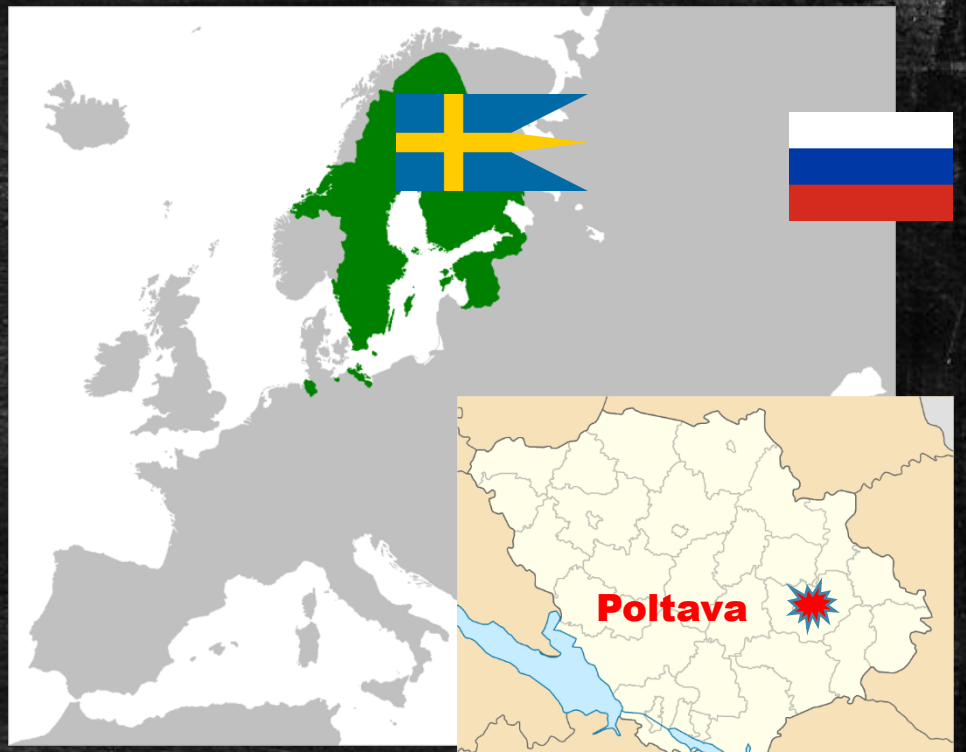
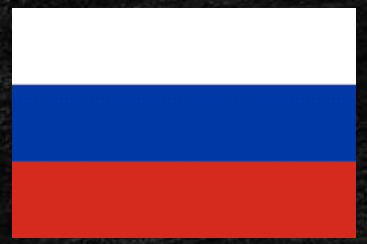
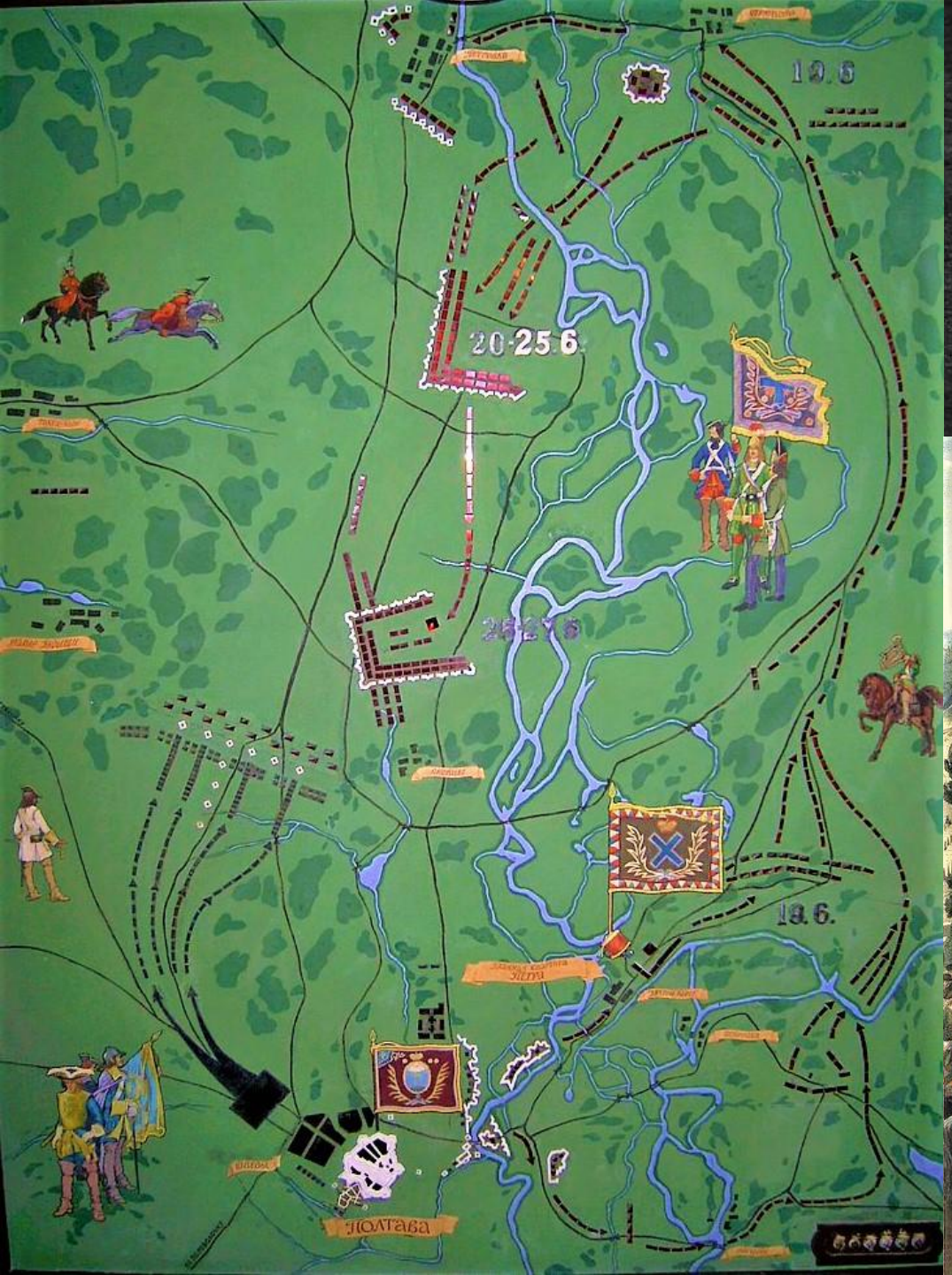


Battle of Poltava 8 July 1709



Russia 1 - 0 Sweden

Anders Dernback slideshow / text wikipedia



Map of the battlefield. Poltava is to the south. Near the Russian fortified camp in the middle, notice the "T" formation of Russian redoubts between the Budyschenski wood to the west and the Yakovetski wood to the east. The original Russian camp is to the north and is marked "20.25.6". The Pushkaryovka camp, with the Swedish baggage, would be in the southwest corner of the map.

The Battle of Poltava (8 July 1709) was the decisive victory of Peter I of Russia, also known as "the Great", over the Swedish forces under Field Marshal Carl Gustav Rehnskiöld, in one of the battles of the Great Northern War.

It is widely believed by historians to have been the beginning of the Swedish Empire's decline as a European great power, while the Tsardom of Russia took its place as the leading nation of north-eastern Europe. The battle also bears major importance in Ukrainian national history, as Hetman of Zaporizhian Host Ivan Mazepa sided with the Swedes, seeking to create an uprising in Ukraine against the tsardom.

Today at the site of the battle there is a State Cultural Heritage Preserve Complex in Poltava known as the Poltava Battle Field, which consists of monuments and churches commemorating the event.

Charles XII had led Swedish forces to early victories in North Zealand (summer 1700) and in the Battle of Narva in November 1700. However, it would take six years before he defeated Augustus II of Saxony-Poland. Peter I withdrew from Poland in the spring of 1706, and offered to cede his Baltic possessions to Sweden except St. Petersburg, but Charles refused. Peter subsequently adopted a scorched-earth policy in order to deprive the Swedish forces of supplies.

Charles ordered a final attack on the Russian heartland with a possible assault on Moscow from his campaign base in Poland. The Swedish army of almost 44,000 men left Saxony on 22 August 1707 and marched slowly eastwards. Charles took the field in November after waiting for reinforcements to arrive. Continuing east, he crossed the Vistula River on 25 December 1707, then continued through a hostile Masuria and took Grodno on 26 January 1708 after Russian troops had abandoned the city.

At the time the Russians had been occupied with a large rebellion of Don Cossacks, known as the "Bulavin Rebellion" (1707–08). This revolt was contained in part by the forces of the Cossack Hetmanate led by Hetman Ivan Mazepa. The Swedes continued to the area around Smorgon and Minsk, where the army went into winter quarters. Charles left 8,000 dragoons under Maj. Gen. Ernst Detlof von Krassow in western Poland.

Poor weather and road conditions kept the Swedish troops in winter quarters until June 1708. In July the Swedes defeated Marshal Boris Sheremetyev's forces at the Battle of Holowczyn and advanced to the Dnieper River. During the spring Gen. Lewenhaupt in Courland had been ordered to gather supplies and march his army of about 12,000 men to join Charles' forces. However, his departure from Mitau was delayed until late June and consequently he only joined Charles' forces on 11 October

Charles decided to move southward into Ukraine

Rather than winter in Livonia or wait for Lewenhaupt, Charles decided to move southward into Ukraine and join Mazepa, who had decided to rebel against Peter. Peter sent Sheremetev to shadow the Swedish army. Lewenhaupt followed south and was attacked while crossing a river near a small village that gave name to the Battle of Lesnaya, losing the supply train and half of his force. In need of resupply, Charles moved towards Baturyn, Mazepa's headquarters, but Russian troops under Aleksandr Menshikov reached the city first. Anticipating the Swedish arrival, Menshikov ordered the merciless massacre of the population, razing the city and destroying or looting arms, ammunition and food.

By the spring 1709

By the spring of 1709 Charles' force had shrunk to half of its original size. After the coldest winter in Europe in over 500 years, Charles was left with 20,000 soldiers and 34 cannons. Short of supplies, he laid siege to the Russian fortress at Poltava on the Vorskla River on 2 May 1709. Peter's force of 80,000 marched to relieve the siege. Upon his arrival, Peter built a fortified camp on the Vorskla, 4 km north of Poltava. While observing the Russian position on 20 June, Charles was struck by a stray bullet, injuring his foot badly enough that he could not stand. In addition, Charles' last hope of reinforcement expired, as the Swedish forces under von Krassow had turned aside to deal with the anti-Swedish Sandomierz Confederation in Poland

The Yakovetski Woods

Between the Russian and Swedish forces the Yakovetski and Budyschenski woods formed a corridor, which the Russians defended by building six forts across the gap. Peter, in addition, ordered four more redoubts built so the entire system of ten forts would have a T shape, providing flanking fire to a Swedish advance. Two of the redoubts were still being constructed on the morning of the battle, but 4,000 Russians manned the remaining eight, with 10,000 cavalry under Gen. Aleksandr Danilovich Menshikov stationed behind them.

BATTLE

Because of his wound, Charles turned over operational command to Field Marshal Carl Gustav Rehnskiöld. Four columns of infantry and six columns of cavalry were to form during the night, 600 meters south of the redoubts, intending to attack before dawn in order to swiftly bypass the redoubt system and hit the Russian fort. The infantry was in place by 2:30 a.m. but the cavalry arrived late, having lost their way. Riding forward, Axel Gyllenkrok observed the Russians at work on the two nearest redoubts and rode back to inform Rehnskiöld. A reconnoitre by Maj.

Carl Gustaf Rehnskiöld

Wolmar Anton von Schlippenbach was discovered by the Russians and the alarm was sounded by the firing of a pistol. Having lost the element of surprise, and without sufficient cannon to breach the fortifications, Rehnskiöld consulted with Charles, Carl Piper and Lewenhaupt on whether or not to proceed with the assault. By the time Rehnskiöld decided to proceed with the attack by quoting, "In the name of God then, let us go forward", it was nearly 4:00 a.m. on 28 June (Swedish calendar) and dawn was already approaching.

The Swedes in Carl Gustaf Roos' column quickly overran the first two redoubts, killing every Russian soldier inside them, but by 4:30 a.m. the attempts to take the third redoubt stalled. Lewenhaupt's ten battalions on the right bypassed the first four redoubts entirely, advancing to the back line and, with the aid of cavalry, took some redoubts while bypassing others. Two of Roos' rear battalions joined them, indicating that issued orders lacked clarity as to whether to avoid the redoubts or attack them in series.

The cavalry on the left wing

The cavalry on the left wing, commanded by Maj. Gen. Hamilton and an infantry regiment, advanced by passing the redoubts on the left and charged the Russian cavalry, forcing them to retreat. It was 5:00 a.m. when the left and right wings of the Swedish army made it past the back line of redoubts, sending the Russian cavalry in retreat. However, Rehnskiöld ordered his cavalry to stop their pursuit and Lewenhaupt, already advancing towards the fort, to withdraw to the west. There they awaited Roos' battalions for two hours, while the Russian cavalry and Ivan Skoropadsky's Cossacks waited to the north, with 13 Russian battalions deployed north of their camp and ten to the south, anticipating a Swedish advance.

Roos Six Battalions

Gen. Roos and six battalions (one-third of the Swedish infantry) became isolated while attempting to take the third Russian redoubt. After suffering severe casualties from several assault attempts, Roos led the remaining 1,500 of his original 2,600 men into the Yakovetski woods to the east at 6:00 a.m. The Russians reoccupied the first two redoubts and launched a two-pronged attack by ten regiments around 7:00 a.m.

Roos was forced to surrender his command.

Charles gathered the remainder of his troops and baggage train and retreated to the south later that same day—at about 7:00 p.m.--abandoning the siege of Poltava. Lewenhaupt led the surviving Swedes and some of the Cossack forces to the Dnieper River, but was doggedly pursued by the Russian regular cavalry and 3,000 Kalmyk auxiliaries and forced to surrender three days later at Perevolochna, on 1 July.

The fear of other reprisals and suspicion of Mazepa's newfound Swedish ally Charles XII prevented most of Ukraine's population from siding with the rebels.

IVAN SKOROPADSKY
HETMAN OF ZAPORIZHIAN HOST

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Charles XII and Mazepa at the Dnieper River after Poltava by Gustaf Cederström.

High-ranking Swedes captured during the battle included Field Marshal Rehnskiöld, Maj. Gen. Schlippenbach, Maj. Gen. Stackelberg, Maj. Gen. Hamilton and Prince Maximilian Emanuel, as well as Piper. Peter the Great held a celebratory banquet in two large tents erected on the battlefield. Voltaire assumed Peter's reason for this, in raising a toast to the Swedish generals as war masters, was to send a message to his own generals about disloyalty. Two mass graves contained the Russian dead, 500 meters southwest of their camp. Previously defeating Peter, Charles had gone so far as to pay the Russian troops. **Peter instead took many Swedes, with great pride, and sent them to Siberia.**

Peter sent them to Siberia.

Lewenhaupt was given command of the infantry at the disastrous Battle of Poltava (1709) and the Surrender at Perevolochna. **He was kept a prisoner in Russia, and he lived in Moscow until his death on 12 February 1719**

Casualties and losses

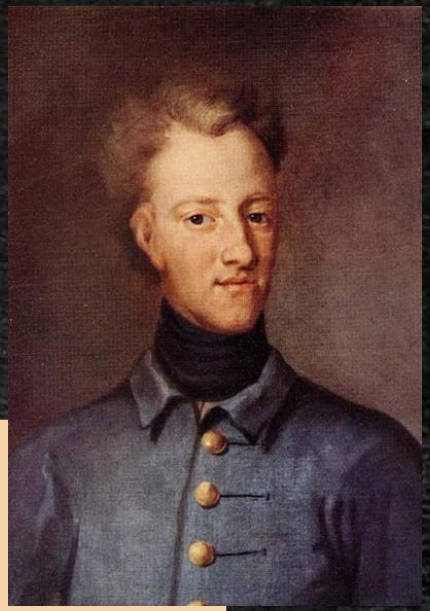
Swedish accounts: 6,900 killed and wounded, 2,800 captured.

Russian accounts: 9,234 killed, 2,864–2,977 captured

Poltava is a city located on the Vorskla River in central Ukraine. It is the capital city of the Poltava Oblast (province) and of the surrounding Poltava Raion (district) of the oblast. Poltava is administratively incorporated as a city of oblast significance and does not belong to the raion. It has a **population of 289,000.**

Charles XII and Mazepa escaped with about 1,500 men to Bendery, Moldavia, then controlled by the Ottoman Empire. Charles spent five years in exile there before he was able to return to Sweden in December 1715. During this time, even handicapped, he retained his magisterial calm demeanor under fire, fighting his way out of several situations. The high vizier of the Turks was eventually paid off, with much intrigue and espionage involved and plots within plots, at one point involving a ransom of the Russian crown jewels, according to Charles' prison translator

Five years of Exile in Bender



Bender, Moldova